

Wires 09/21/20

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US Delegation Headed by Special Envoy Grenell Holds Talks in Kosovo - Prime Minister

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - A US delegation headed by Special Presidential Envoy Richard Grenell visited Kosovo, Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti said in a statement on Monday.

"Extremely delighted with today's visit of the US delegation led by Amb[assador] Richard Grenell. Kosovo is blessed with friends like the USA," Hoti said via Twitter.

The visit followed a meeting between Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and Hoti in Washington on September 4 during which the two officials signed an agreement on economic cooperation mediated by US President Donald Trump.

During Grenell's visit to Kosovo, both parties issued a joint statement hailing progress regarding the US-Kosovo Investment Incentive Agreement.

The province of Kosovo and Metohia, historically a Serbian territory, was subject to an armed uprising led by the Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army terrorist organization. NATO used the conflict as a pretext for an unauthorized military campaign against Serbia and Montenegro in 1999 - then forming the federation of SR Yugoslavia - ultimately causing ethnic cleansing of much of the non-Albanian population in Kosovo and Metohia.

In February 2008, the Kosovo Albanians unilaterally proclaimed independence from Serbia under US and EU tutelage. Kosovo has since become one of the world's centers for organized crime and narcotics distribution and a major threat to the territorial integrity of neighboring Macedonia and Montenegro.

Serbia has vowed not to recognize Kosovo's independence and launched a campaign to convince other countries to not recognize its province or recall their recognition.

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Trump Says Pick for US Supreme Court Possible on Saturday Out of 5 Women Candidates

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump said he may choose his candidate for the US Supreme Court on Saturday and is considering the potential candidate for a list of five women to replace the deceased justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

"I'd rather see it all take place before the election," Trump told reporters on Monday, referring to the November 3 presidential election.

Trump pointed out that he has already spoken to some of potential candidates and plans to hold more meetings soon.

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US Charges New York Police Officer With Acting as Illegal Agent for China - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - The US charged a New York City policeman for allegedly acting as an illegal agent of China and providing Beijing with information on fellow ethnic Tibetans, the Justice Department said on Monday.

"A criminal complaint was unsealed today in federal court in Brooklyn charging Baimadajie Angwang, a New York City Police Department officer and United States Army reservist, with acting as an illegal agent of the People's Republic of China (PRC) as well as committing wire fraud, making false statements and obstructing an official proceeding. Angwang was arrested today and will make his initial appearance this afternoon before United States Magistrate Judge Roanne L. Mann," the department said in a statement.

The suspect also allegedly provided information to Beijing on potential intelligence sources within the Tibetan community in New York, the release added.

A criminal complaint released earlier said the 33-year-old Angwang was born in the autonomous region of Tibet in China and obtained asylum in the US. He allegedly reported on the activities of ethnic Tibetans to the Chinese Consulate, the complaint added.

If convicted, he faces a maximum sentence of 55 years' imprisonment, according to the Justice Department.

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US House Probe Finds Deficient Conditions at Migrant Detention Centers

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - The House Homeland Security Committee published a report on Monday that found that US immigration enforcement agencies failed to correct deficiencies in conditions at migrant detention facilities.

"DHS [Department of Homeland Security], including ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement], has several tools at its disposal to identify and correct deficiencies in conditions at ICE detention facilities," the report said. "In practice, unfortunately, these tools frequently leave deficiencies unidentified and uncorrected."

The report said the DHS oversight programs of ICE detention facilities are too infrequent and pre-announced, which give detention facilities time to prepare for inspections.

The report also found that DHS has few mechanisms to enforce corrections and rarely uses them. In addition, the report said ICE contracts with private contractors that are poorly equipped and do not meet the agency's own detention standards.

The report also said migrant detainees in ICE custody lack medical, dental and mental health care, including lack of protection from COVID-19.

Other deficiencies include a lack of legal and translation services, and unsanitary conditions, the report said.

House Homeland Security Committee Chairman Bennie Thompson said in the release that he hopes DHS officials will work quick to address the problems pointed out in the report.

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Mayors of 3 Democrat-Run Cities Say Will Legally Challenge Trump's Defunding Order

NEW YORK, September 21 (Sputnik) - The mayors of three Democrat-run cities in the United States on Monday vowed to legally challenge what they called a politically-motivated attempt by the Trump administration to deny them federal funding because of allowing street protests. Earlier on Monday, the US Justice Department designated New York City, Portland and Seattle as jurisdictions that allow anarchy in a move that will allow the federal government to restrict funding for those cities.

"The President [Donald Trump] and [Attorney General] Bill Barr's latest stunt is pure politics and unconstitutional," New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said via Twitter. "We will see them (and beat them) in court if we have to."

Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan said in a Twitter message that the Trump administration's actions are "a gross misuse of federal power and blatantly unlawful."

Durkan said Barr is obsessed with Seattle and with her, making his approach "irrational and most importantly, a huge distraction."

The Seattle mayor noted that her city has been battling four crises at the same time: the novel coronavirus pandemic, an unprecedented economic downturn, the greatest civil rights reckoning in decades and the continued threat of climate change.

On September 2, US President Donald Trump instructed the Justice Department to identify cities that are "permitting anarchy" so that federal funds to the jurisdictions can be restricted. Protests against police brutality and racism have broken out in primarily Democrat-run cities after the death of George Floyd in police custody in Minneapolis on May 25. Many of the protests turned into riots complete with violence against police and civilians as well as acts of looting, property damage and arson.

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REVIEW - US Unveils Sanctions Targeting Iranian Scientists, Violators of Arms Embargo

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump on Monday signed an order greenlighting severe economic penalties on foreign nations, corporations and individuals that violate the UN arms embargo on Tehran, while the Treasury Department sanctioned Iranians tied to the country's nuclear program.

TARGETING IRAN ARMS TRADE

The United States revealed that it would enforce the reinstatement of international anti-Iranian sanctions, despite no backing for it at the United Nations Security Council. It also announced more than two dozen fresh designations over Iran's nuclear and ballistic projects as well as its conventional weapons trade.

"The Executive Order I am issuing today blocks the property, and interests in property, in the United States of those who contribute to the supply, sale, or transfer of conventional arms to or from Iran, as well as those who provide technical training, financial support and services, and other assistance related to these arms," US President Donald Trump said in a statement. "This Executive Order is critical to enforcing the UN arms embargo on Iran."

US National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien said Trump's order prevents the export of conventional arms to "rogue regimes" by Iran and bans the export of weapons by arms-producing nations to Tehran "where Iran will in turn provide them to terrorists and to rogue regimes."

The international conventional arms embargo is set to expire next month after the UNSC rejected a US proposal to prolong it. Now the US considers it in place indefinitely after it initiated the snapback sanctions mechanism of the Iranian nuclear agreement. Other key council members, including Russia and European nations, rejected the move, claiming that the Americans lost legal rights for it after they left the deal with Iran.

"I always knew that an elephant is a symbol of the [Trump's] Republican Party but please do not consider the world as a china store," Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said, reacting to the US unilateral moves in an interview to Al Arabiya broadcaster.

NEW DESIGNATIONS

The Trump administration also announced on Monday new sanctions and export control measures on 27 entities and individuals connected to "Iran's proliferation networks," among them nuclear scientists, a logistic branch of the Iranian military and Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro.

"Our actions include... designation by the Department of State of Iran's Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics (MODAFL), Iran's Defense Industries Organization (DIO) and its Director, Mehrdad Akhlaghi-Ketabchi, as well as Nicolas Maduro, the illegitimate dictator of Venezuela, for conventional arms-related activities pursuant to the new Iran Conventional Arms Executive Order," the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement.

Over Iran's nuclear project Departments of State and Treasury designated six individuals and three entities associated with the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, including two "who were re-listed by the UN sanctions that returned on September 19, 2020." Another five individuals affiliated with the AEOI will be subject to the Commerce Department's export control restrictions. Three individuals and four entities with ties to Iran's liquid propellant ballistic missile organization, the Shahid Hemmat Industrial Group, were designated in connection with alleged missile proliferation activities.

Pompeo warned that sanctions will stay and get tougher until Iran changes its behavior and embarks on negotiations to resolve all issues of concern.

"We will continue and expand our sanctions until Iran is willing to conclude a comprehensive negotiation that addresses the regime's malign behavior. We are always open to diplomacy with Iran, but Iran must respond with diplomacy, not with more violence, bloodshed, and nuclear extortion. Until then, maximum pressure will continue," he said.

O'Brien confirmed that the US seeks a "grand deal" with the country. Pentagon chief Mark Esper said that in the meantime American forces stand ready to respond to any "future Iran's aggression" and defend its allies.

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UNGA Adopts Declaration Celebrating UN's 75th Anniversary, Pledges to Build on Progress

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) – The UN General Assembly member states on Monday adopted a declaration marking the 75th anniversary of the United Nations' establishment and said they will build on the progress achieved throughout the organization's history.

"We have come far in 75 years but much more remains to be done. We have the tools and now we need to use them," the declaration said. "Guided by the purposes and principles of the Charter, we are here to ensure the future we want and the United Nations we need."

The declaration pointed out that the United Nations has promoted decolonization, freedom, global development, human rights, the principle of sovereign equality of all states and eradicating diseases.

"The United Nations has helped to mitigate dozens of conflicts, saved hundreds of thousands of lives through humanitarian action and provided millions of children with the education that every child deserves," the declaration said.

However, the declaration acknowledged that the United Nations had its moments of disappointment, including on the issues on growing inequality, poverty, hunger, armed conflicts, terrorism, climate change and the novel coronavirus.

To better recover from the ongoing pandemic and its effects, the UN member states said they are determined to implement fully and on time the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and ensure effective collaboration with financial institutions, focusing on the humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable populations, the document said.

Digital technologies are capable of accelerating the realization of the 2030 Agenda and the United Nations must shape a vision on beneficial and cooperative technology use while ensuring safety and addressing potential digital threats.

In addition, the declaration said the UN member states are determined to curb greenhouse emissions, ensure equal and active participation of women and youth in all domains, as well as respect international law, abide by existing agreements, enhance democratic governance and promote peace and justice.

The United Nations must be updated and able to adapt to new global challenges in a rapidly changing world and the member states pledge to revitalize the work of the organization's three main organs - the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, the declaration said.

The United Nations was established on October 24, 1945, after the Second World War by 51 countries aiming to prevent future wars, develop friendly relations among nations and improve living standards and human rights.

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US Wants EU Cooperation to Stymie Iran Arms Trade - Envoy Abrams

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - The United States hopes to cooperate with the EU in preventing countries from engaging in the arms trade with Iran, US Special Representative Elliott Abrams told reporters on Monday.

"We hope for very good cooperation from the EU in preventing anyone else from engaging in the arms trade with Iran. We certainly look forward to good cooperation on that," Abrams said during a conference call.

He expressed hope that not only the EU, but other countries also will maintain arms embargoes against Tehran.

Abrams warned about penalties for those who do not abide by these restrictions.

"Our message to anybody who is considering buying [weapons from Iran]: do not do it because the price you will pay will be quite elevated," he said.

Earlier on Monday, National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien said US President Donald Trump signed an executive order to severely sanction nations, companies and individuals who sell or supply Iran weapons.

The executive order also seeks to prevent Iran from exporting conventional arms to rogue regimes and bans the export of weapons by arms-producing nations to Iran, O'Brien said.

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US to Expand Sanctions Until Iran Ready to Negotiate - Special Representative

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - The United States will expand sanctions against Iran until the country is ready to come back to negotiating table, US Special Representative Eliot Abrams said during a conference call on Monday.

"We will continue and we will expand our sanctions until is willing to the comprehensive negotiations," Abrams told reporters.

The Special Representative noted that the United States is always open to diplomatic efforts in dealing with Iran, but "Iran must respond with diplomacy, not with more violence, bloodshed and nuclear extortion."

Until that point is reached, the US maximum pressure on Iran will continue, Abrams added.

Earlier on Monday, US announced new sanctions against a number of entities and individuals for assisting Iran's nuclear program.

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Abrams Says Iran Will Pay 'Heavy Price' if Conducts Acts of Terrorism Against US

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - US Special Representative for Iran Elliott Abrams said during a conference call on Monday that Iran will pay a heavy price if it carries out acts of terrorism against Americans.

Earlier in the day, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said during a think tank event that Iran has not closed the book on potentially retaliating against the United States for the assassination of Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani in Iraq earlier this year.

"Iranian threats of acts of terrorism need to be taken seriously, it is a little bit surprising that such threats of acts of terrorism come from a foreign minister... should Iran commit acts of terrorism against Americans, you can be sure that they will pay a very heavy price," Abrams said.

Earlier this month, US media reported that the United States believes Iran has been plotting to assassinate the US ambassador to South Africa Lana Marks in retaliation for the killing of Soleimani.

President Donald Trump vowed to respond with an attack that would be "1,000 times greater in magnitude" if Iran carries out any attack in any form against the United States.

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Iran's Zarif Says 'Book Not Closed' on Avenging Soleimani Assassination

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif at a virtual think tank event on Monday said Tehran has not closed the book on the possibility of retaliating for the US assassination of top Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani. Over the weekend, the head of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Maj. Gen. Hossein Salami said that Tehran is committed to enacting revenge against those responsible for the death of Soleimani. Hossein's comments were prompted by a Politico report that claimed Tehran has been plotting an assassination attempt on the US ambassador in South Africa as part of plans to avenge the general's killing.

"I am not in the business of making threats, but the book is not closed," Zarif said during a Council on Foreign Relations virtual event when asked about Iran retaliating over Soleimani's assassination.

Zarif added that the Iranian general was a hero to many in the region because of his role in combating extremists, most notably the Islamic State (a terrorist group banned in Russia), and many still want answers for his death.

On January 3, a US President Donald Trump-ordered airstrike killed Soleimani, one of the most prominent military figures in Iran, and several other members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps on the outskirts of Baghdad. The assassination prompted Tehran to launch missile strikes on US bases in Iraq.

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US to Prevent Iran Cooperation With North Korea - Special Representative

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - The United States will watch very carefully instances of cooperation between Iran and North Korea and will try to prevent them, US Special Representative for Iran and Venezuela Elliott Abrams said during a conference call on Monday. "We are very concerned about Iran's cooperation with North Korea. ... We will be watching the cooperation with North Korea very carefully and doing what we can to prevent it," Abrams said. Abrams also said he could not discuss further details regarding the possible actions the United States might undertake regarding cooperation between Iran and North Korea.

Iran is reportedly resuming work with North Korea on long-range missiles, according to media reports citing a senior US official.

Earlier on Monday, National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien said US President Donald Trump signed an executive order to severely sanction nations, companies and individuals who sell or supply Iran with weapons.

The executive order also seeks to prevent Iran from exporting conventional arms to rogue regimes and bans the export of weapons by arms-producing nations to Iran, O'Brien said.

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US Bombers Carry Out Global Exercise Over East Europe, Western Pacific - EUCOM

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - The US Air Force has carried out a major bomber exercise sending combat forces escorted by fighters over Eastern Europe and the Western Pacific, US European Command (EUCOM) said in a news release on Monday.

"Multiple US Air Force bombers from Europe and the United States conducted an extensive Bomber Task Force mission today, while integrating with NATO Allies and partners' fighter jets," the release said. "The mission flew over multiple geographic regions near the eastern-most portion of Europe and the western-most portion of the Pacific Ocean."

EUCOM pointed out that the exercises were carried out by a force of B-1 Lancer, B-2 Spirit and B-52 Stratofortress aircraft in executing a long-planned mission of exercising the bombers' global capabilities.

"This mission demonstrates the US Defense Department's ability to command and control its bomber force for any mission, anywhere in the world, at any time, in support of the US National Defense Strategy," the release said.

The exercise globally integrated air forces with numerous European Allies such as Canada, Norway and the United Kingdom, the release added.

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US Owes Iran Compensation for Nuclear Deal Pullout - Zarif

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - The United States must compensate Tehran for losses incurred after Washington unilaterally pulled out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) governing the country's nuclear program, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif said on Monday.

"The United States withdrew from the JCPOA without any reason - it incurred a lot of damages on the Iranian people," Zarif said during a Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) virtual meeting. "I think it is the United States that has show[n] it is committed to [the JCPOA]... that it will compensate Iran for the damages."

On Saturday, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that the US would unilaterally re-impose UN sanctions on Iran for "non-performance of its JCPOA commitments." The other JCPOA signatories and the UN Security Council have rejected the US move.

Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden has vowed to return the US to the Iran nuclear deal if elected. However, Iran's top diplomat said that Tehran's position is not predicated on who occupies the White House following the election.

Zarif ruled out further negotiations with any US administration about alterations to the JCPOA, saying that the deal in place is fair and that Iran made concessions to agree to it. The foreign minister added that Iran will not allow itself to be "bullied" into a worse deal through power politics, should the US come back to the table.

Tehran has condemned the US' unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA arguing the newly imposed sanctions are having a humanitarian impact on the 83-million nation with Washington blocking Iranian payments for things like medicine leading to crippling shortages.

In 2015, Iran signed the JCPOA with Russia, China, France, Germany, the European Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It required that Iran scale back its nuclear program and severely downgrade its uranium reserves in exchange for sanctions relief, including lifting the arms embargo five years after the deal's adoption. In 2018, the United States abandoned its conciliatory stance on Iran, withdrawing from the JCPOA and implementing hard-line policies against Tehran.

Earlier this year, the US tried to campaign for the restoration of international sanctions on Iran, specifically, an extension to the arms embargo, but all of its draft resolutions ended up being rejected.

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US Special Envoy Jeffrey Visits Northeast Syria, Iraq, Germany - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - US Special Representative James Jeffrey has started a five-day trip to northeast Syria, Iraq and Germany, the Department of State said in a media note on Monday.

"Special Representative for Syria Engagement and Special Envoy to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS [Islamic State terror group, banned in Russia] Ambassador James Jeffrey, joined by Special Envoy for Syria Joel Rayburn, travels to northeast Syria, Erbil, Iraq, and Berlin, Germany from September 20-24," the note said.

On Sunday, Jeffrey held separate meetings with senior officials of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the negotiating delegations of the ongoing Intra-Kurdish dialogue, ranking members of the Syrian National Council and with tribal leaders from the Dayr al-Zawr region, the State Department said.

In Erbil, Jeffrey will hold meetings with senior leaders from the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, including President Nechirvan Barzani, the State Department also said.

Jeffrey will arrive in Berlin on Wednesday for meetings with senior German officials to discuss the situation in Syria, the State Department added.

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Trump Signs Order to Sanction Entities, Persons Who Assist Iran's Weapons Trade - O'Brien

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) – US President Donald Trump signed an executive order to severely sanction nations, companies and individuals for selling or supplying Iran with weapons, National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien said on Monday.

"The President signed just moments ago in the Oval Office an executive order this morning, which will resolve in severe economic sanctions for those nations, corporations and individuals who contribute to the supply, the sale or the transfer of conventional arms to the Islamic Republic of Iran," O'Brien said.

The executive order also seeks to prevent Iran from exporting conventional arms to rogue regimes and bans the export of weapons by arms-producing nations to Iran, O'Brien added.

"Transfers to and from Iran of arms or related materiel or military equipment represent a continuing threat to regional and international security" the order said. "Iran benefits from engaging in the conventional arms trade by strengthening its relationships with other outlier regimes, lessening its international isolation, and deriving revenue that it uses to support terror groups and fund malign activities."

The executive order blocks all property and interests related to Iran's weapon trades. The document also prohibits relevant transactions between US citizens and companies and Iranian authorities.

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US Claims of Iranian Attempts to Interfere in Upcoming Election 'Nonsense' - Zarif

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) – The notion that Iran is attempting to meddle in the upcoming US presidential elections is "nonsense," Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif said on Monday.

"There are allegations that Iran is engaged in trying to infiltrate the US electoral system, this is nonsense," Zarif said during a Council on Foreign Relations event.

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Pentagon Stands Ready to Respond to 'Future Iranian Aggression' - Esper

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - The United States is ready respond to any aggression by Iran as it moves to re-impose major sanctions against that country, US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper said during a briefing on Monday.

"We stand ready to respond to future Iranian aggression and we remain committed to doing our part in [Trump] administration's maximum pressure campaign," Esper told reporters.

On Saturday, the United States announced that it considers nearly all UN sanctions against Iran reinstated and on Monday announced new penalties against entities and individuals involved in Iran's nuclear and ballistic programs.

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Iran Ready to Exchange All Prisoners With US - Foreign Minister

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - Tehran is prepared to exchange all prisoners with the United States, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Monday.

"We are ready to exchange all prisoners, period," Zarif said during a Council on Foreign Relations event.

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US Imposes New Sanctions on 27 Entities, Individuals over Iran's Nuclear Program - O'Brien

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - The United States is imposing new sanctions and other penalties on 27 entities and individuals connected to Iran's nuclear weapons program, US National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien announced on Monday.

"The Trump administration is also imposing new sanctions and export control measures on 27 entities and individuals connected to Iran's nuclear weapons program," O'Brien said during a press conference at the State Department.

The White House also moved to restore the implementation of previously suspended UN sanctions on Iran, that it now considers reinstated, he added.

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US Sanctions 5 Iranian Scientists for Assisting Tehran's Nuclear Program - Ross

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - The US government has sanctioned five Iranian scientists for their role in Tehran's nuclear development program, Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross said on Monday.

"Today, US Department of Commerce adding five Iranian scientists to the entity list for enabling or assisting Iran's nuclear development program," Ross told reporters.

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US Sanctions 2 Individuals Central to Iran's Uranium Enrichment Operations - Pompeo

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Monday announced sanctions against two individuals who he said are central to Iran's uranium enrichment program.

"I'm also announcing sanctions on Hamid Reza Ghadirian and Ahmad Asghari Shiva'i under an existing US authority targeting proliferators of weapons of mass destruction," Pompeo said. "These individuals are central to [Iran's] uranium enrichment operations."

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US Sanctions Venezuela's Mauro Over UN Arms Embargo On Iran - Pompeo

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Monday announced sanctions against Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro for allegedly defying the United Nations arms embargo imposed on Iran.

"We're also sanctioning the previous president of Venezuela, Nicolas Maduro," Pompeo said in a press conference. "For nearly two years, corrupt officials in Tehran had worked with the illegitimate regime in Venezuela to flout the UN arms embargo."

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US Announces Sanctions on Iran's Ministry of Defense - Pompeo

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - The United States on Monday imposed sanctions on Iran's Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics, along with the country's Defense Industries Organization, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said.

"Today, I will take the first action under this new executive order by sanctioning the Iranian Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics, and Iran's Defense Industries Organization and its director," Pompeo said.

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Trump Says Oracle, Walmart to Have Total Control of TikTok or US Will Not Approve Deal

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) – Oracle and Walmart will need to have “total control” over the Chinese video-sharing app TikTok in order for the United States to approve a deal between the company and its two US partners, President Donald Trump said on Monday.

“They are going to have total control over it,” Trump told Fox News in an interview. “If we find that they do not have total control, then we are not going (to) approve the deal.”

The US TikTok saga has accelerated since August after Trump threatened to ban the app in the United States, citing wider concerns about alleged Chinese government spying on data of Americans using China-originated social media.

Trump's ban of TikTok was originally to take effect on September 20, with his administration offering the app's founding company, ByteDance, one way out: Sell to a US entity. Several American interests cropped up then for talks with TikTok, with early Walmart and Oracle appearing to have crossed the finish line for a deal.

CNBC, however, quoted ByteDance as saying it would own a majority stake in the new US entity to be called TikTok Global. The statement, in Mandarin language, insisted the company was not losing control of the social media app, CNBC said.

The report also said that as part of the deal, Oracle, Walmart and ByteDance agreed to list TikTok Global on an American stock exchange within 12 months, adding that a small round of pre-IPO, or initial public offering, financing will give ByteDance an 80 percent stake in the new entity.

Trump, when asked about this on the Fox News segment, said ByteDance will at best have a minority stake in the restructured TikTok.

Even after going public, “it's all going to be run by Walmart and 100 percent Oracle,” he said.

The president also said that his Democrat rivals in the US Congress complained that TikTok was being treated unconstitutionally "but it's going to bring 25,000 jobs and it's going to be based in Texas. They are moving it (the company) into our country. There can be zero security risk." TikTok filed a lawsuit in a US court last month to defend itself against any blockage of its US operations. It said the Trump administration's action was without any prior outreach to the company that gave it a chance to respond to the accusations, violating the US Constitution and the firm's right to due process.

It also countered the administration's attempts to paint it as a "Chinese company" when it already had "more than 1,500 employees across the US pour their hearts into building this platform every day, with 10,000 more jobs planned in California, Texas, New York, Tennessee, Florida, Michigan, Illinois, and Washington State".

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US Justice Dept. Says New York City, Portland, Seattle Allow 'Anarchy' - Statement

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Justice has designated New York City, Portland and Seattle as jurisdictions that allow "anarchy" in a move that will allow the federal government to restrict funding for the cities, according to a statement released on Monday.

"The US Department of Justice today identified the following three jurisdictions that have permitted violence and destruction of property to persist and have refused to undertake reasonable measures to counteract criminal activities: New York City; Portland, Oregon; and Seattle, Washington," the statement said.

The list of Democrat-run cities comes in response to a memorandum issued by President Donald Trump on September 2 instructing the Justice Department to identify cities that are "permitting anarchy" so that federal funds to the jurisdictions can be restricted.

"We cannot allow federal tax dollars to be wasted when the safety of the citizenry hangs in the balance. It is my hope that the cities identified by the Department of Justice today will reverse course and become serious about performing the basic function of government and start protecting their own citizens," Attorney General William Barr said.

In case of New York shootings in July and August 2020 increased by 177% and 166% respectively, while the city council cut \$1 billion from the police budget for 2021 fiscal year, according to the Justice Department.

Portland saw over 100 consecutive nights of protests marred by vandalism, chaos, and even killing, while the council slashed \$15 million from the police bureau, and the mayor sent a letter to President Donald Trump rejecting the offer of federal law enforcement.

The Justice Department accused Seattle authorities of permitting "anarchists and activists to seize six square blocks of the city's Capitol Hill neighborhood," where person-related crime increased by 525%.

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Trump Says Oracle, Walmart to Have total Control of TikTok or US Will Not Approve Deal

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) – Oracle and Walmart will need to have “total control” over the Chinese video-sharing app TikTok in order for the United States to approve a deal between the company and its two US partners, President Donald Trump said on Monday. “They are going to have total control over it,” Trump told Fox News in an interview. “If we find that they do not have total control, then we are not going approve the deal.”

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Trump Plans to Announce Supreme Court Nominee Friday or Saturday - Interview

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) – President Donald Trump on Monday said he plans to announce his pick to fill the vacant seat on the US Supreme Court at the end of this week, either Friday or Saturday.

“I’m looking at five [potential nominees] very seriously and making a decision either on Friday or Saturday. I will announce it either Friday or Saturday,” Trump told Fox News in an interview. He added that he has a list of four or five finalists and wants the Senate to confirm his pick ahead of the November 3 election.

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RPT: REVIEW - Biden Leads Polls on Virus Handling, Trump Still Stronger on Economy

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden has maintained his lead both nationally and in key US swing states over the past week largely due to voter confidence in how his administration would handle the pandemic, although President Donald Trump is still seen as stronger on economic issues despite the recent crash.

ECONOMY VS. VIRUS

A Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll released on Sunday revealed that Biden leads nationally by 8 percent, possibly boosted by perceptions that he is better capable of managing the pandemic. Biden now has a 22-point lead, 51% to 29%, on COVID-19 handling, up from 11 points in June, according to the survey.

However, voters, by a 10-point margin, see Trump as better suited to manage the economy despite a pandemic that has left millions unemployed, the poll showed.

The labor market lost 21 million jobs between March and April and shrank by a record 33 percent in the second quarter amid widespread lockdowns due to COVID-19. The United States gained 1.4 million jobs in August, and the unemployment rate dropped to 8.4 percent, falling below the 10 percent-mark for the first time in four months.

One notable trend seen in the data has been the remarkable stability in the polls despite the country being rocked by multiple crises including social unrest over police brutality in addition to the pandemic and economic woes.

"Simply put: In 2020, the fundamentals of our country have been shaken to our core, while the fundamentals of the election have not," Democratic pollster Jeff Horwitt said in the report.

The poll also revealed that early voting could reach record levels in the 2020 election. Some 52% of those surveyed said they plan to cast a ballot before the November 3 election, either in-person or via mail.

Americans have higher interest in this year's election than any other, the poll also showed. 80% of respondents rated their interest level at either 9 or 10 on a ten-point scale compared to 68% in 2016 and 72% in 2012.

BIDEN MAINTAINS GRIP OVER BATTLEGROUND TERRITORY

According to the average of the most recent surveys published on poll aggregator Realclearpolitics.com (RCP) as of Sunday evening, the former vice president leads by 6.5 percent nationally, a full point lower than last week.

Given the structure of the Electoral College national surveys are less significant than polling in key battleground states. That said, the state-level polling reveals that if the election were held today, Biden would win by a landslide.

Biden leads in eight of the top 10 largest battleground states, the sum of which account for nearly 35% of the total electoral votes (538) apportioned across 50 states, a majority of which is needed to win the election.

Yet Biden's lead is under three percent in 3 of those states, according to the RCP averages. In fact, the only states in which Biden has a "comfortable" lead includes Minnesota (+10), Wisconsin (+6.7) and Arizona (+5.0).

However, besides gaining in the national polls, there is no good news for Trump on the statewide level in terms of momentum since September 13.

The only major movement in the polls since last week consists in Biden narrowing Trump's lead in Texas by more than a point to 1.2% and the former vice president boosting his lead by four points in Minnesota, where the Trump campaign has invested significant resources to win. Biden's edge has remained flat in Florida (+1.6), Pennsylvania (+4.0), Ohio (+2.4), Michigan (+4.8), and North Carolina (+0.9), while Trump's lead in Georgia has hung steady at 1.3 percent. The presidential debates scheduled for September 29, October 15, and October 22 for many experts are a wildcard whose impact on the polls is entirely unpredictable.

SENATE UP FOR GRABS

The Republicans are hoping to again win the majority of the 100 seats in the U.S. Senate. The Senate currently consists of 53 Republicans, 45 Democrats and two Independents but 35 seats are up for grabs on the November 3 ballot. This includes 33 regular seats along with two others vacated by Arizona Senator John McCain's death and Georgian Johnny Isakson's premature retirement due to health reasons.

Friday's death of liberal-leaning Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg has made the Senate races even more relevant, although whomever Trump nominates to replace her could be confirmed before the next presidential term begins on January 20.

Even if Trump were to win, he needs at least 51 Senators to approve his nominee, hence why the Republicans are motivated to fast-track the nomination process.

The conservatives held a 5-4 majority on the Supreme Court before Ginsburg's death. Many liberals fear a high court stacked with six conservatives will put an end to abortion rights.

Based on the current polling numbers the Democratic Party would end up with 51 Senate seats. According to the RCP average, recent polls show that seven seats are in the "toss up" category. Six of these seats are currently held by Republicans and one by a Democrat. Four of the six Republican incumbents are currently losing, according to the poll aggregator.

In Arizona, Democratic candidate Mark Kelly leads Republican incumbent Martha McNally by 6.7%. The three other Republicans down in the polls include Iowa's Joni Ernst (-0.4), Maine's Susan Collins (-6.0) and North Carolina's Thom Tillis (-3.6). Michigan incumbent Democrat Gary Peters has a 3.6% lead.

Meanwhile, the Democrats appear to be in a good position to maintain control of the 435-member House of Representatives, where they have a 36-seat edge. All 435 seats will be on the November 3 ballot.

The Democrats have a solid lead in 214 races to 190 for the Republicans with 31 in the toss-up category, according to RCP. The Democrats need to win at least 218 seats to maintain majority control.

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